

John 15:2b

EVERY BRANCH THAT BEARS FRUIT HE PRUNES TO MAKE IT BEAR MORE FRUIT.

Before being in Surfers Paradise, Sandra and I spent some time in Toowoomba in the early 2000s. Can anyone tell me what Toowoomba is known for? Carnival of the Flowers.

One of the first questions we were asked when we moved there was what we were going to do with the garden in the church house? What were we going to plant? Would we like to compete in the Carnival? We made it very clear to our brothers and sisters there that gardening and the Uptins were not to be used in the same paragraph – we didn't really enjoy it and we weren't really good at it. Now some things have changed over time but if you asked our family where gardening sat in the list of the top 10 things we like to do, it still is not up the top.

But even though I am not an avid gardener I know what the phrases in this verse mean.

I know what a branch is. It is a bit of a tree or bush that is not the fruit and it not the stem or root. In most instances the big bottom bit is the stem or trunk or root, the colourful things right out on the end are fruit, and the green or brown bit which comes off the trunk and from which the fruit hangs is the branch.

I know what it means to bear fruit. My parents have a lemon tree in their front yard. It is bearing fruit at the moment. If a tree is bearing fruit it means that it is alive and is doing what it should be doing. It is getting the right nutrients through the trunk up and out the branch. It is getting the right amount of sun and water.

I know what it means to prune. In fact my wife would say that is my greatest skill as a gardener. I love getting in with secateurs and saw and hacking away – or pruning as some like to call it.

Now I don't think I'd be speaking too far from the truth to say that you too know what these terms mean. You understand branch and fruit and prune.

The people Jesus was talking to understood them as well. Whether they were winners of the Galilee flower show or not, they knew what these things meant. So, like us, they bring this knowledge to what Jesus is saying – because in the end he isn't talking about how to win the Carnival of Flowers competition, he is talking about our relationship with him and with our heavenly Father.

What does he say?

Branches – Jesus is the vine, the trunk, the root, the stem. We are meant to be the branches. So we get our sustenance from Him – he says as much in verse 4 – a branch cannot bear fruit

by itself unless it abides in the vine. We walk away from the vine and we will not bear fruit. We don't regularly get feeding from the vine and we will not bear fruit. So it is important that you read your Bible, that you pray, that you meet, that you get into a small group, that you listen intently to what Tania has to say each week and check it out, that you listen intently to what I say and check it out. Apart from me you can do nothing says Jesus in verse 5. However it might be for you, make sure you stick close to the vine.

Fruit – my Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. What does Jesus mean? What is the fruit that he is expecting? This is very multifaceted. Just before this Jesus was calling on his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled by their circumstances but to trust him. If they could do that then that would be bearing fruit. So it is with us. Jesus has told Thomas that he is the way and the truth and the life. Bearing fruit is bearing witness to this. Bearing fruit is helping others know that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Bearing fruit is helping others come to accept him as my Lord and my God (as Thomas did after Jesus rose from the dead). Bearing fruit is sharing our physical possessions, our time, our resources. But always it is with a view to pointing people to the vine. That is why Jesus is using this picture here. He doesn't just want people to look at Maroochydore Anglican and say "what wonderful things you are doing in the community" or "thanks for sharing that with me" or "thanks for helping me out". He wants people to see what we are doing – to see the fruit – and to trace it back to the trunk or the vine or the root and glorify God because of it. So let's continue to make sure we let people know why we do what we do – it's because of Jesus.

Prune – this is the hardest bit of all. Jesus speaks of his father as the vinegrower. God the Father has the big picture in view and he can see if branches are not bearing fruit – they serve no purpose and will be cut off the vine. He removes every branch that does not bear fruit (verse 2). Now let's see what Jesus is saying here – he says that if we abide in him we will bear fruit. So those who are not bearing fruit are those who are not abiding in him. It is these whom the Father will write off – all the more reason to continue working hard at abiding in Jesus. But even then, when we are abiding in Jesus and we are bearing fruit and people know that we are Jesus people – even then God will prune us. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. We all know how this works horticulturally but when it happens personally it is not easy. I am bearing fruit for Jesus, people are coming to know him through what they see in me – and then God prunes me so that it might happen more. Sounds good until you think about what pruning might look like? Might God allow you to become ill so that you might bear more fruit? Might God take you away from Maroochydore so that you might bear more fruit? Might God cause some personal tension within this church to help you all bear more fruit? I don't know what it will look like, but I do know that it will be painful and it

will hurt and it will challenge and we will wonder why it is happening because we are being so faithful in abiding in him and bearing fruit. So we have to remember at times like that, that God has the bigger picture in mind, he is the vinegrower and his desire is that we might bear much more fruit.

There is a lot more we could say about this half verse, but let me pray and then I want to introduce you to BCA.

Dear Lord God

You are the vine, we are the branches, keep us abiding in you.

Help us to continue to go in your name and go in your love so that the world will come to know that you have power to heal and to save.

Help us as the father prunes us to continue trusting and continue abiding and continue walking and continue bearing fruit.

Amen.